Review article

White liberals, 'the left' and the new Africanist elite in South Africa

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Democracy and apartheid: political theory, comparative politics and the modern South African state. By Anthony Butler. Basingstoke: Macmillan. 1998. 212pp. £42.50. ISBN 0 333 66593 7.

The awkward embrace: one-party domination and democracy. Edited by Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins. London: Harwood Academic Press. 1999. 369pp. £38.00. ISBN 9 057023 73 3.

Business and democracy: cohabitation or contradiction? Edited by Ann Bernstein and Peter Berger. London: Pinter. 1998. 179pp. £49.99. ISBN 1 8556 7498 x.

Recently there has been growing conflict and acrimony between the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and white liberals in South Africa (SA). Many observers are surprised by this because it is occurring at a time when ideological divisions between the liberals and 'the left' have narrowed and the ANC is adopting many of the economic policies and political principles of which the liberals have traditionally been leading (though not the sole) proponents.

These conflicts among opponents of apartheid have deep historical roots. These include: (i) the ideological divisions between white liberals, represented in organizations such as the Liberal Party, the Progressive Party, the Democratic Party and the SA Institute of Race Relations, and the communists and socialists, organized in the SA Communist Party and the Congress of Democrats;[1] (ii) competition among the non-Africans, who usually dominated both the liberal and the communist organizations, for influence with the ANC and other organizations representing the African majority; (iii) resentment on the part of some (though by no means all) Africans against the (mainly white, Indian and coloured)

1 The 'white' wing of the Congress Alliance of which the ANC was the leading member; there were also separate Congresses for Indians and coloureds.

liberals and communists. This Africanism waxed and waned over time, leading to the breakaway from the ANC by the PAC (Pan-Africanist Congress) in 1959, and the emergence of the black consciousness movement in the 1970s. Currently, another phase of Africanism is underway, directed particularly against white liberals, and this is overshadowing the continuing divisions between the liberals and the old left.

Butler's rather eccentric book, *Democracy and apartheid*, provides a reminder of the continuing salience of the left's hostility towards the liberals, though few on the left have gone as far as he does both in denigrating democracy and in assigning so much of the responsibility for apartheid to liberal democracy. Butler challenges the 'celebratory attitude to democracy and...the myth that democracy ended apartheid'. He argues that 'democracy can have a malign role in the modern state…and that (in SA) democratic practices contributed to apartheid's evils (while)…bourgeois political theory proved well designed to (support the myths) that bolstered high apartheid and helped to create it'. Underlying this analysis is Butler's curious belief that SA under apartheid was a democracy: 'From 1910 to 1960 South Africa was characterized by political competition within recognizable liberal institutions (although it had)...a racially defined franchise, it was a democracy…and representative democratic practices supported an increasingly systematic institutionalization of human exploitation… (SA's democracy) proved to be easily compatible with systematic oppression of the majority'. He also maintains that the separate development policy, which conceded so-called self-government to Africans in the Bantustans, proved 'disturbingly difficult to condemn on the terms of liberal democracy'.

There is merit in challenging 'conventional views', but it is difficult to engage with Butler's argument because he does not define what he means by democracy or by liberalism. Until the election of the Afrikaner National Party (NP) in 1948, SA had certain features of an oligarchical democracy such as existed in ancient Athens. But there is surely no criterion by which a society which permanently excludes the majority not only from vote but from any rights of citizenship would now be considered democratic. Most other critics of 'bourgeois democracy' are unlikely to agree with Butler that apartheid SA was a democracy, but many of them fully share his hostility to SA's white liberals. The difficulty in engaging with Butler is compounded by the fact that he makes little reference to the writings of leading liberal political thinkers.[2] Instead, he views them almost entirely through the spectacles of what he terms 'progressives'—their Marxist rivals, who often declared that they disliked the liberals more than the (former ruling) Afrikaner Nationalists. And despite his announced intention of operating as a political scientist, he approaches his subject largely by way of the bitter, polemical debates between liberal and Marxist historians. Butler has not engaged

[2] Among those to whose work Butler does not refer are Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, Charles Simkins, Leo Marquard, Anthony Matthews, John Dugard, Johann Degenaar, Jeffrey Butler, Steven Friedman, Douglas Irvine.

with SA's white liberals, but only with the left's demonized caricature of them.

In pre-1990 SA, liberals were non-communists who opposed apartheid on the basis of the classic liberal principle of individual rights. But Butler, perhaps because he conflates liberals and conservatives, seems to think the liberals were supporters of group rights. In SA, most political organizations made some accommodation to the country's officially entrenched racial/ethnic divisions. The Congress movement, led by the ANC, had separate wings for Africans, coloureds and whites until 1969, when non-Africans were accepted as members of the ANC-in-exile. The Progressive Party, of which Helen Suzman was a member, reluctantly accommodated to this SA practice by restricting its membership to whites. But, in 1968, the Liberal Party, with many of its leaders banned or in exile, dissolved itself rather than desegregate as required by the Prohibition of Political Interference Act—i.e. faced with the terrible choices apartheid forced on people, it chose to self-destruct rather than to give up the principle of individual rights.

A more pertinent criticism of SA liberals might be of their elitist approach that favoured the wealthier and better educated. They focused mainly on political issues and, as with all SA opposition movements, their economic policies were poorly developed. However, there were marked differences among the liberals, both on political issues (the Liberal Party adopted universal suffrage; the Progressive Party a qualified franchise); and on socio-economic issues: some supported social democratic policies including state-led action to tackle black poverty; others were what would now be termed neo-liberals or free marketeers, who preferred to rely on the competitive market forces that (in order to favour whites in labour and land markets) apartheid sought to combat. There was also a deep division among liberals over whether it was justifiable to use violence to overthrow apartheid.

Butler treats all liberals, past and present, as hardline neo-liberals. He also depicts them as racists, ignoring their well-documented record of opposition to apartheid. But white liberals did not, as he claims, find the separate development policy 'disturbingly difficult to condemn'. The overwhelming majority rejected the NP's Bantustan policy as a crude ruse to exclude blacks from political rights in the central SA state. Also misleading is his claim that liberals saddled Afrikaners with the responsibility for racism in SA. Some liberals did adopt anti-Boer attitudes, but so did some members of the ANC, PAC and SACP.[3] Moreover, liberal scholars such as Leonard Thompson took an early lead in arguing that Afrikaners were by no means the only racists, and had suffered much injustice themselves. They did this without losing sight of the fact that Afrikaner nationalists were the most consistent advocates of apartheid. Butler's attitude towards the Afrikaner National Party is ambiguous, and he certainly treats them with more sympathy than their liberal critics. This, and the claim that his book is a 'contribution to socialist revisionism', make it difficult to understand his

[3] See, for example, Brian Bunting, *The rise of the South African Reich* (London: Penguin, 1964).

own position. Is this part of that post-modernist multiculturalism which attacks universal liberal values as racist while excusing the narrow chauvinism of minority ethnic cultures?[4]

In the 'progressive' canon on which Butler relies, white liberals are blamed for the apartheid past and denied any credit for their achievements. The role of the liberal lobbies and of business in eroding apartheid; the contributions of academics and writers to research and analysis of the nature and effects of apartheid; the bridging role of liberal ideas and institutions in facilitating SA's transition to democracy—all these are airbrushed out of the history books. Now, the liberals—identified with 'neo-liberal, global' forces—are being held responsible for SA's post-apartheid disappointments, including its poor record of economic growth and failure to reduce inequality. But, while the ANC has adopted some elements of the neo-liberal package (the disciplined macro economic stance, and the exchange rate and tariff policies that are widely regarded as good for growth) the ANC has also adopted affirmative action and cost-raising labour policies are not 'free market' policies—whether for good or for ill. Moreover, the free market debate is more distinct from the redistribution debate than the SA discourse recognizes and a number of 'neo-liberal' advisers, including the World Bank, have urged more state-led redistribution than the ANC has been willing to contemplate.[5] The situation is therefore complex, with responsibility for the current economic malaise resting at least partly within the ANC itself—and not just with its self-seeking business elite. The left would be hard put to refute charges of supporting the interests of a labour aristocracy, while they neglect the rural poor and the unemployed.

The radical rhetoric that demonizes white liberals and treats them like enemies has contributed to a strengthening of their hardline neo-liberal wing. It has also provoked some of them into a tendency to snipe at everything the ANC does. Resentment is also evident among the 'softer' liberals: Randolph Vigne's *Liberals against apartheid* documents the long history of hostility from left as well as right against SA's liberals. Vigne depicts the liberals as having prepared the forward positions that other South Africans, black and white, have moved on to occupy while they remained frozen out. Vigne likes the liberals to Matthew Arnold's 'body by the wall', the warrior slain in the victorious attack on the Philistine fort.[6]

SA's white liberals are not alone in being members of an economically powerful ethnic minority that suddenly loses political power to the formerly subjugated indigenous majority. But SA's whites (whether liberal, left or conservative) are in the uncomfortable position of being in transition from the role of decolonizers (who usually depart after the handover of power) to members of the former ruling group, who have to adapt to a less privileged

[4] On these issues, see Alain Finkielkraut, *The undoing of thought* (London: Claridge Press, 1988).
[5] World Bank, *Options for land reform and rural restructuring in South Africa* (Washington DC, 1993).
[6] Randolph Vigne, *Liberals against apartheid: a history of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953–68* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

position in the society they hitherto dominated. Fluidity, insecurity, and jockey-ing for position are to be expected; so too are shifts in interests and values, exemplified by the sudden conversion of many formerly conservative whites to support for the democratic processes and liberal principles hitherto supported by only a small minority of whites. This conversion has contributed to the rapid growth of support for the Democratic Party, which became the official opposition in the 1999 election, winning 10 per cent of total votes (up from under 2 per cent in the 1994 election). In the forefront of the concerns of this (larger and more differentiated) group of 'liberals' is whether the former white hegemony will simply be replaced by black hegemony.

There is a confused debate about whether—given what many perceive as the ANC's built-in racial majority and the inherent weakness of the opposition—democracy in SA can be meaningful. There is also concern about how the ANC will deal with SA's extreme poverty and inequality (World Bank data rate it as the world's most unequal society). Is the ANC's strategy for combining growth and redistribution likely to strengthen or undermine democracy and racial reconciliation? These questions are addressed in the volumes edited by Giliomee and Simkins and by Bernstein and Berger.

Can there be 'real' democracy in one-party dominant states?

Many political scientists refuse to classify one-party dominant regimes as democratic, regarding them as disguised autocracies. The influential study by Przeworski and Limongi insists on alternation in office before classifying a regime as democratic.[7] But others, such as Pempel, are prepared to view dominant one-party states as democratic or as potential bridges to democracy. Pempel's study of the industrialized one-party democracies argued for less rigorous criteria for democracy, specifying the holding of competitive elections with universal franchise in which there was no massive fraud, and the effective exercise of civil liberties.[8]

The awkward embrace, edited by Giliomee and Simkins, follows in the footsteps of Pempel's study, and evolves a set of still more flexible criteria to cover its four semi-industrial countries—South Africa, Taiwan, Malaysia and Mexico. They also view them as useful case-studies for testing Seymour Martin Lipset's hypothesis that there is a strong linear relationship between the level of GNP and democracy, and the rival hypothesis of Dankwart Rustow that the transition to democracy does not follow automatically from economic growth, but involves an explicitly political process. In their useful introduction to this excellent volume, Giliomee and Simkins distinguish between: (i) regimes with some pluralist democratic features, but lacking a competitive multi-party system and other liberal features; and (ii) multi-party systems with a dominant party

[7] A. Przeworski and F. Limongi, 'Modernization: theories and facts', *World Politics*, 49: 2 January 1997.
[8] T. J. Pempel, ed., *Uncommon democracies: the one-party dominant regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

playing according to most democratic rules, but short of the alternation in power. They explore whether and how regimes evolve from being less to being more democratic, and conclude that the essential preconditions are the willingness to undergo regular electoral endorsement and the presence of countervailing power able to check authoritarian tendencies. They do not therefore have a simple democratic/undemocratic typology: the category of semi-industrial one-party dominant states is fluid, with degrees of democratization in which 'the same institutional container…has the potential to hold quite different contents'.

The chapters on Taiwan by Chu and Rigger suggest that, out of the four countries covered in the book, this country has advanced furthest towards fully fledged democracy, and is now a very pluralist society. Taiwan, with the highest per capita GDP of the four case-studies, provides clearest support for the Lipset thesis, with democracy strengthening in the wake of broadly based socio-economic development and the emergence of a vigorous, independent middle class, which the study identifies as necessary though not sufficient for the establishment of democracy. Chu argues that international pressures have also been significant in pushing Taiwan towards democratization, because of the ruling Kuomintang's concern about international legitimacy—a feature it shares with SA.

International pressures were also significant in pushing Mexico towards democracy, though here they worked very differently. Mexico is characterized by a 'corporatist pact' between big business and unionized labour, overseen by the state and based on import substitution industrialization behind protectionist barriers. Recently, this elitist pact has been undermined by global pressures forcing open the economy and pushing the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party towards democratization: 'increasing globalisation of production and markets limiting state patronage and control' has led to more competition and undermined corporatist ties between party and labour. This has not only opened up the economy (to both the dangers and the opportunities of global forces) but is also liberalizing the political system. SA shares with Mexico significant corporatist features, though one could argue that in SA these are not only linked to a protectionist import substitution policy, but also to that combative partnership between business and the unions which helped to secure a retreat from apartheid without wrecking the economy.

Trends in Malaysia are more ambiguous. Wealth is concentrated in the Chinese minority, and the ruling United Malays National Organization embarked on an ambitious affirmative action programme to advance the indigenous Malay majority. This has contributed to the emergence of a Malay middle class, but not yet to much political liberalization. Jesudason's analysis portrays Malaysia as 'stuck between authoritarianism and democracy' and attributes this to the dependence of its middle class on state power and patronage. Malaysia has some striking parallels with SA, and has provided the model for its affirmative action policy. However, SA has not yet been able to rival Malaysia's fast growth rate, which facilitated this policy, and which was based on a combination of

higher skill levels and more internationally competitive wage levels.

SA is an intriguing example, both because of its inheritance of bitter racial conflict and because the per capita incomes of the black majority are below the level at which transitions to democracy generally occur. (However, while SA is unusual, it is not unique, and India, an even poorer democracy, would have provided an illuminating comparator.) Giliomee and Simkins characterize SA as a 'syncretic state…with a bewildering mix of ideological approaches and clashing commitments'. They do not attempt to paper over some sharp disagreements among their contributors; this allows for an illuminating debate, including the frank expression of that deep pessimism about SA's prospects that is more pervasive than its record since 1990 seems to justify.

The pessimists (who include the editors) fear SA is going the route of a 'state-sponsored middle class' and that its liberal democracy will erode into 'mere majoritarianism and electoralism…with majority racism disguised as democracy'. Underlying their anxiety about the prospects for democracy is the fear that SA has not resolved its racial tensions and that it will prove difficult to do so in the context of a disappointing economic performance, with continued negative growth in per capita incomes. They fear SA will go the route of Zimbabwe, declining into an ineffective democracy in a corrupt and collapsing state. As signs of this they cite political mobilization on a racial basis; the concentration of power at the centre, away from parliament and the provinces; the ANC's failure to act against corruption and incompetence; and its growing intolerance of criticism—castigated as disloyal if from blacks and racist if from whites.

These negative trends are linked to the ANC's organizational weakness, and its dependence on the trade unions to mobilize the vote. The pessimists recognize that the unions played an important role in the battle against authoritarianism in SA as elsewhere (though SA's white unions hardly played a progressive role!). But they argue that, historically, trade unions have been ineffective in consolidating democracy and that in SA the price of union support is economic policies, such as 1997–8 labour legislation, which are reducing SA's competitiveness and employment and hence damaging its prospects for both economic growth and democracy. These pro-market critics believe the prospects for a more coherent, growth-oriented strategy depends on a split in the tripartite alliance, with the ANC breaking away from the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). This desire for a split is mirrored on the left, which hopes the ANC will move closer to COSATU and the SACP, shed its economic liberals, and adopt policies less friendly to capital.[9]

However, the critics of SA's 'majoritarian democracy' do not confront the fact that the ANC *is* elected by the majority of voters, has thus far respected SA's liberal constitution and its independent judiciary and press, and coexists

[9] See, for example, H. Marais, *South Africa: limits to change* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998); and A. Habib and R. Taylor, 'Parliamentary opposition and democratic consolidation in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 26: 79, 1999.

with a wide range of civil society organizations. This recognition provides the starting point for the more positive view of the ANC's record and prospects taken by Heribert Adam and Steven Friedman. Adam argues that the ANC is the only party that can guarantee stability and democracy and he dismisses 'exaggerated fears' about its democratic credentials. As a way of providing voice for the opposition, Adam advocates corporatism, which will facilitate 'the consensual type of democracy simple majoritarianism lacks...with single party dominance balanced by corporatist veto powers' for economically powerful minorities.

There may be political logic in Adam's argument, but he does not confront the economic consequences of corporatism, which can serve the needs of well-mobilized groups, such as business and unions, but is not a well-designed vehicle for the unorganized poor and unemployed, who constitute SA's major socio-economic problem. Adam chides business for not challenging a corporatist deal that favours the smallish black elite, but this is surely an inherent part of such deals. Moreover, his assumption that corporatism in post-apartheid SA is well attuned to the needs of big capital is questionable. In an increasingly competitive global market, capital might do better with the faster growth rate that more internationally competitive wage levels would facilitate. If this generated more jobs, it would also serve the interests of the poor. However, this outcome would conflict with the interests, at least in the short-term, of organized labour, which opposes this strategy. Where corporatism benefits SA business is by sheltering it from competition from foreign capital and from the unbundling of pyramid-type holdings.

Under apartheid, corporatism played a crucial role in strengthening the trade union and business critics of apartheid and in facilitating the negotiating process that made possible SA's relatively peaceful transition. But in post-apartheid SA, the effects of corporatism seem likely to be less positive because it favours well-organized vested interests. Corporatist bargaining could also undermine SA's democratic institutions, for example by allowing business, the unions and the executive to preempt the role of parliament because of their right virtually to vet labour and other economic policies in statutory institutions such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council. The play of interests around corporatism is complex, but it illustrates the painful dilemma for the left that, in situations of high unemployment, the interests of unionized labour (and in SA also of the middle class beneficiaries of affirmative action policies) can conflict with those of the poor and unemployed. In SA, as in Mexico, corporatism seems likely to come under pressure from globalization. Giliomee and Simkins see hope in globalization which 'through increasing competition puts some pressure on corrupt or inefficient state–business links' and they argue that SA has already benefited by undergoing transition within 'a more pluralistic political order'. But the opposite view of globalization is taken by the left, which does not want SA to go down the market-oriented path.[10]

[10] Ibid.

To return to the question of one-party dominance, Friedman's chapter reminds us that such dominance is not to be taken for granted: long-term parties lose power, as in India, Japan and Italy. The ANC has problems delivering to its supporters and handling both its opponents and its own dissidents. But Friedman regards as a strength the syncretic mix that is deplored by both Simkins and Giliomee and the left. He argues that the ANC would be unwise to shed either its business supporters or the traditionalist chiefs on the right or COSATU on the left: its strength lies in its capacity to accommodate diversity.

Dealing with its dissidents and opponents raises that minimal requirement for democracy: the government's willingness to tolerate criticism and dissent and to refrain from demonizing its opponents. This is hardly required in relation to the (former ruling) NP, delegitimized by its record. But it has become salient in relation to the white liberals: the Democratic Party's relations with the ANC have deteriorated sharply, exemplified by the ANC's refusal to allow it (unlike Inkatha) the chairmanship of any of the parliamentary portfolio committees. The toleration of dissent is also relevant to the ANC's relations with SA's wide range of NGOs, many dating from the anti-apartheid years, with which the ANC now has an ambiguous relationship, revealed in its abortive attempt to control their funding.

In rejecting the argument that democracy in SA is a facade, Donal Cruise O'Brien's chapter argues persuasively that, if voters support the ruling party because they dislike the acrimony of multi-party politics, then 'if that's the majority view, that's still democracy'. What is more dubious is the deduction that Africans, favouring consensus and disliking adversarial politics, are not interested in liberal values and in political competition and choice. There are increasingly vigorous voices from Africa, including that of Nigeria's President Obasanjo, which reject such 'African exceptionalism' arguments—whether they are used to excuse undemocratic political practices or to represent the giving of 'gifts' to political leaders as an African tradition rather than corruption.[11]

The overwhelming racial/ethnic vote for the ANC does not, *per se*, render SA undemocratic. What is more worrying is the concentration of power at the centre and the tendency to demonize its critics—and currently it is white liberals who are the main targets. Whatever the reasons for this development—a hangover from the ideological disputes of the apartheid years (now being recast in terms of the debate over globalization); an attempt by the left to preserve its separate identity, for which an enemy is useful; continuing rivalries among the (mostly non-African) old left and liberal activists for influence with the ruling ANC; the changing support base and policies of the rapidly growing 'liberals'—these old ideological animosities are now being complicated and overshadowed by a bout of anti-white racism among the emerging African elite. This is not fomented by the ANC leadership, which has used the list system of selecting MPs to ensure a much higher representation of non-Africans

[11] Merle Lipton, *The challenges of governance in Africa* (Wilton Park Report, The Stationery Office, 1999).

in parliament than among its own voters. Nevertheless, an assertive Africanism is growing within its ranks and this is adding to the strains of the historically difficult relationship between on the one hand the white liberals and business (often indiscriminately lumped together) and on the other hand the African nationalists and the left (also lumped together).

The distinguished academic and business contributors to *Business and democracy,* such as Gus Papanek, Gordon Redding and Bobby Godsell, look for lessons for SA from the experience of Asian countries with economically dominant ethnic minorities and governments representing the poorer, indigenous majority. Among excellent chapters is Myron Weiner's account of how the Chinese business community handled its relations with majority governments in Indonesia and Malaysia by strategies which included buying off anti-business politicans, nurturing an indigenous business elite, and supporting anti-poverty educational and job-creation programmes. These strategies contributed to economic growth, but have not eliminated the danger that economic setbacks could stimulate chauvinistic nationalism, especially in Indonesia. Weiner urges minority business in multiethnic societies to avoid nurturing crony capitalists or becoming too entangled with the ruling party; they should rather press for policies that will lead to broadly based development and reduce the economic causes of ethnic conflict. But, in SA, how would his persuasive argument accommodate the demand of the assertive black elite for rapid progress for themselves now?

In considering the historical relationship between business and democracy, Michael O'Dowd notes that capitalist development has usually preceded the rise of democracy and has often coexisted with undemocratic regimes, including those unsympathetic to business, such as the Russian Tsars. He emphasizes the diversity of views within business, which has been deeply divided on most of the great political issues, such as free trade, imperialism and racism, including the case of Nazi Germany where, *inter alia*, the substantial Jewish business community obviously opposed the Nazis. The record of business faced with authoritarian regimes is mixed: on occasions they supported such regimes, often because of fears about political stability and populist economic policies; but O'Dowd and the editors argue that the interests and values of business have, increasingly, made it a pressure for democracy.

Bernstein *et al.* favour an activist role for business in support of democratization and social development. They believe the strong business organizations needed for this role will contribute towards more effective policy-making and also lead to the 'thickening' of civil society. This approach accords with current calls—including from many critics of business—for them to take on a wider social responsibility role, including functions in relation to education and health that are usually performed by the state. But this fashionable view requires closer scrutiny: it is not self-evident that so much 'thinning' of the state is desirable, with business and other non-governmental actors taking on so many of the traditional functions of the state, including those of its elected representatives.

SA's huge task of socio-economic reconstruction surely needs to be state-led, undertaken by the ANC government with its popular mandate, with support from business, the unions and the country's numerous NGOs.

In urging this activist role for business, Bernstein *et al*. are clearly influenced by the role played by business in eroding apartheid. Their analysis of this role is surely supported by the course of events in SA. However, this view of the positive role of business is challenged by many (though not all) on the left, who continue to reiterate the neo-Marxist argument that capitalism and apartheid were two sides of the same coin. This belief, which fuels hostility to business and to white liberals, is not confined to academic ivory towers. It was evident in much of the testimony presented to the Business Sector Hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and it seems likely to form part of the revised history syllabus being drafted for schools in the 'new' SA.

Does this infighting among SA's newly empowered black elites and its rich but politically disempowered non-African elites matter politically? Yes, if it contributes to the exodus of skills and capital among young professionals who feel they are not wanted and that their opportunities are blocked. The resultant tension and acrimony probably also contribute towards the surprisingly negative image of SA, expressed in what seem to be exaggerated fears for its future and under-appreciation of its considerable political achievement and economic potential. Confidence is not inspired by the feeling that the (black and white) elites—when not scrambling for places on the gravy train—are diverted from confronting the crucial problem of the growing disjuncture between SA's notable political advance and its continued extreme poverty by these historical resentments and rivalries.

However understandable many of these resentments, those between the left and liberals in particular are becoming a worrying irrelevance. There is the danger that liberals will retreat into a hard-right, anti-redistributionist stance, combined with complete rejection of the need for any affirmative action and continual sniping at the ANC; meanwhile the left could retreat into a new ethnicism which in practice benefits only fat cats and the labour aristocracy, while they also attempt to isolate SA from the international marketplace. This would leave the growing number of unemployed with nowhere to turn to for income but the rising crime which is alarming both South Africans and international investors. But there are surely people of goodwill in all segments of SA's divided elite who could agree on the need for a reasonably consensual redistribution aimed at the poor rather than the elite. This will only be possible in the context both of job-generating growth and of a negotiated redistribution that will have to come primarily not from SA's relatively highly taxed middle class, but from its small group of exceptionally wealthy people, who account for a large part of the extreme inequality that has won for SA the dubious honour of being the world's most unequal society.